DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 209 053 RC 013 017

AUTHOR Edington, Everett D.
TITLE Organization and Supervision of the Rural School.
PUB DATE Nov 81
NOTE 10p.; Presented at the Annual Conference on Rural and Small Schools (3rd, Manhattan, KS, November 16-17, 1981).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Administrative Problems; *Administrator Role; Adoption (Ideas); Change Agents; *Change Strategies; Community Characteristics; *Educational Change; Elementary Secondary Education; Institutional Characteristics; Rural Areas; *Rural Schools; School Administration; *School Organization; *School Supervision; Small Schools
IDENTIFIERS *Time Utilization

ABSTRACT

Because the supervisor in the small school is often a Jack-of-all-trades, he may see himself as a manager rather than as a leader; however, to be an effective administrator, he must not only be ready for change but must be instrumental in creating desired change. Characteristics that affect the willingness and ability of rural schools to accept change are: the multiple functions of rural schools; tension between stability and change in rural communities; the recentness and circumstances of school district consolidation; size, geographic dispersion, and population density of rural school districts; the heterogeneous nature of rural populations; and a limited and precarious economic base. Introduction of change may create conflict, lower staff morale, and lessen willingness of local communities to support schools. The administrator should see himself as a change agent. He must also realize his responsibility for consequences which result from change made under his supervision. Although there is little correlation between effectiveness and amount of time spent on the job, there is high correlation between effectiveness and amount of time spent on high-priority objectives. Therefore, the administrator must plan and control his time, and he must build on the strengths of others. (CM)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED209053

ORGANIZATION AND SUPERVISION OF THE RURAL SCHOOL

By

Everett D. Edington
Director
ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural
Education and Small Schools
New Mexico State University

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Everett D. Edington

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

November 1981

*Presented at the Third Annual Conference on Rural and Small Schools held at the Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kansas, November 16-17, 1981.

RC 013017

ORGANIZATION AND SUPERVISION OF THE RURAL SCHOOL

By Everett D. Edington
Director
ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural
Education and Small Schools
New Mexico State University

Due to the complexities of the role of the small rural school administrator, it is quite easy to see oneself as a manager rather than a leader. What I mean by this is that a manager pretty much spends his or her time with organization and seeing that the structure of the organization functions, whereas a leader is a more dynamic type of person, identifies the goals and objectives and brings about those changes within the organization that helps meet those goals and objectives. Ben Harris with the University of Texas describes this on the continuum for what he calls tractive versus dynamic leadership. The tractive leader is more concerned with the maintenance of the status quo, not rocking the boat, and the dynamic leadership is continuous toward change within the school system. There are times in the life of any organization, however, when either might be appropriate. Continuous change can play havoc within a school or within a community. There are times when the administrator needs to slow down and let the people catch up to those changes which have been made. The administrator should recognize, however, that change is inevitable. To be an effective administrator, one must not only be ready for the change but be instrumental in bringing about desired change. Within a rural school and community, there are particular skills which are necessary in working with the people there to bring this type of leadership around.

The supervisor in the small school becomes a Jack-of-all-trades. Many times he may be superintendent, principal, director of instruction, financial

officer as well as director of personnel. In other cases, this person may be a combination of these roles depending upon the community. There are also differences depending upon geographic situations. In many places the administrator finds himself a manager of negotiated contracts. In other cases, in rural areas where elective negotiations have not yet come into being, he finds his ability for leadership is that of facilitator of curriculum development (Stern, 1979). It should be realized, however, that the major goal of any supervisor or administrator in an educational setting is to facilitate learning. Carmichael (1980) reported that the perennial problem of the small/rural school is its tendency to offer a more limited curriculum than larger schools. This is due either to smaller enrollments or geographic isolation. This makes the role of the educational supervisor much more critical in helping to provide an adequate learning environment for the students and the teachers within that school setting.

Too often the rural principal or other administrator in a supervisory role finds little time to supervise but merely manage. Much of the time is spent on being concerned with bus schedules, scheduling for athletic events, collecting money, seeing that it is taken to the bank and other quite mundane and relatively unimportant activities in relationship to the learning process. Such activities as curriculum design, program evaluation, teacher evaluation, often take a back seat and these things if they are accomplished are usually done on the spur of the moment and not as a part of the total improvement program of the school. An excellent example of the problem that the principals of the rural schools have is that they find themselves assisting teachers to administer programs designed to meet the needs of the disadvantaged pupil with very little support services when compared to those in the larger schools (Stern 1979). Many such roles are forced on them by mandates of state legislatures or state

departments of education and these mandates are geared for the much larger school where the variety of personnel are available in meeting them and the rural school administrator finds himself or herself in a predicament where they need a variety of skills for which they have not been trained.

One of the largest undertakings, looking at the characteristics of rural schools related to change, was the Rural Experimental Schools Project (Deal & Nutt, 1979). Edington in his article on "Change in Rural Schools," published in 1981 in the Rural Sociologist, brought out some of these characteristics that effect the willingness and ability of rural schools to accept change.

1. The Multiple Functions of Rural Schools. In rural communities, the school is often the center of the social life and other activities within the community. It is frequently an accepted fact that much of the entertainment for the community is provided by or in the school.
2. The Tension between Stability and Change in Rural Communities. The power structure within the rural community generally has much more immediate contact with the school than it would in urban areas. Quite often this power structure desires stability, and change can often disrupt the status quo and cause tension. The change agent must identify this power structure and be able to work within it to bring about change and still have some type of stability.
3. The Recentness and Circumstances of School District Consolidation. Consolidation has been a thorn in the side of rural people for some time. Often it has been a barrier to proper change. Many times, whether to consolidate or not becomes the issue, rather than whether

the consolidation would bring about higher-quality education. In some cases it would, and in many cases it would not. It is sad that consolidation has become such an issue when the real problems are concerned with providing better education within the community.

4. The Size, Geographic Dispersion, and Population Density of Rural School Districts. Due to smaller administrations and fewer people in positions of authority, it is sometimes easier to bring about change in rural schools than in urban schools, even though rural schools have been historically slower to change. The change agent should take advantage of the smallness of the schools and the smaller number of people to work with in order to effect change in the rural community. There is even some idea that the assumption that rural schools are the most difficult to change may be only a myth.

Rural schools may be among the most rapid to change, as they have been among the slowest to change in the past. We will see them catching up with many of the advances made by their urban and suburban counterparts in the last two decades. They will have the opportunity of learning from the mistakes that urban and suburban schools have made and should be able to adopt only those innovations that meet the particular needs of rural areas.

5. The Heterogeneous Nature of Rural Populations. In rural America, we see a phenomenon of reverse migration taking place. Throughout the 1960s and early 1970s, a large number of people migrated to the urban areas, and thus we saw steady declines in rural populations. However, the past six-to-eight years, this migration has been reversed and we see growth taking place in a great many rural communities. It is interesting to note that the people coming to

these communities are generally of a higher level of education and somewhat higher socioeconomic status than many of the long-term residents. The first area in which they see the opportunity for making changes is in the schools. Many of them are getting themselves elected to school boards and are making changes within the communities by relying on this type of power. They also expect the same types of services they had in the urban and suburban schools which they left. This is causing frustration in many of the rural citizens, who are unable to cope with the rapid changes taking place.

6. The Limited and Precarious Economic Base. In many states, the local tax base provides a large part of the support for the rural schools. Some states are changing this. About 25 states in the nation now have special support formulas for providing funds to rural schools. Many of these rural districts must have more state support before they will have the economic base necessary for supporting innovation and change. There seem to be a trend toward more state funding of schools. As this takes place, the burden is lessened for the local taxpayer.

There are solutions available to help overcome these problems. We in rural America still have a sense of cooporation rather than antagonism and this is found generally within the schools. Franseth (1965) reported that teachers still want help and they want constructive criticism as well as more classroom visits and help from their supervisors. One of the problems that many of the small school administrators voice, is that of a lack of opportunity of interaction with other administrators and that their professional growth and development is quite stunted. There needs to be cooperative programs of in-service aimed toward the small school district administrators.

This could be done by intermediate service agencies, state departments of education or on a cooperative basis among the schools themselves to bring them together and help in their own professional development. Don and Barbara Miller (1979) in a report called Time and Resource Management for Small Schools, included the following list by Kenneth Erickson. He says that in order to improve output for time spent it is important to recognize the following facts:

1. There is little correlation between effectiveness and the amount of time spent on the job.
2. There is high correlation between effectiveness and the amount of time spent on high-priority objectives.
3. Effective people plan and control their time; ineffective people are controlled by events and constituents.
4. Effective people keep time audits periodically so they know where their time goes. They work systematically to manage the little discretionary time that can be brought under their control.
5. Effective people build on strengths--their own and those of their superiors, colleagues, and students.
6. The only real choice is to do first things first. Avoid majoring in minors or you might resemble the woodcutter who said, "I never have time to sharpen my saw because I am too busy cutting down the trees."
7. Spend time on duties which draw the highest hourly rate of pay and avoid activities that someone who is paid less or not at all--students or volunteers--might do.

An administrator should see himself as a change agent. There are some pitfalls of change which must be avoided (Deal & Nutt, 1979). The Abt Study identified the following problems from the rural schools of the National Rural Experimental Schools Program:

1. Introduction of change may create or intensify conflict among students, teachers and administrators.
2. The morale of many administrators or teachers may drop and some may leave voluntarily or otherwise.
3. Conflict may intensify between the local community, parents or residents. The district or school community members will become vocal and attendance at school board meetings may increase.
4. The willingness of local communities to support schools may wane and the tax and bond levies may likely be defeated.

The administrator is also responsible for the consequences which are brought as a result of the change that takes place in his supervisory role. There are many functional consequences that are desirable as a result of change. Some disfunctional consequences are undesirable. There are also the direct consequences with changes in a social system which are planned as an immediate response to the innovation. Quite often the indirect consequences are changes in the social system that occur as a result of the innovation that are either unplanned or may be quite undesirable.

The administrator of the small rural school is in a unique situation. He or she could be the tractive person and maintain the status quo or they can spend their time and energies on the improvement of the instructional program and quite often can be riding on a shaky ship.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Carmichael, Dale; De Foe, Bettye Haller; A Description of Curriculum Development Activities and Programs Related to Small/Rural Schools in Texas, 1979-80. Texas Education Agency, Austin, Texas. ED 190 294

Deal, Terrence E., and Samuel C. Nutt; Promoting, Guiding and Surviving Change in School Districts. Cambridge, MA: Abt Associates, Inc. 1979. ED 192 962

Edington, Everett D.; "Change in Rural Schools," The Rural Sociologist, v1 n6, 1981.

Franseth, Jane; Supervision in Rural Schools: A Report on Beliefs and Practices. Office of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C. Bureau of Educational Research and Development, 1976. ED 054 873

Miller, Donald F. and Miller Barbara (ed.); Time and Resource Management for Small Schools; ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools, New Mexico State University, Las Cruces, New Mexico, 1979. ED 167 305

Stern, A. Kenneth; Instruction Ranked Highest by Most Rural Elementary Principals; 1979. ED 171 496